

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A package of foodstuffs having a minimum predetermined overall weight, the package comprising:

5 a first foodstuff having a first composition and a first minimum predetermined component weight; and

a second foodstuff having a second composition and a second minimum predetermined component weight;

10 wherein the first and second foodstuffs are designed to be cooked together for a single cooking time such that the first and second foodstuffs each are cooked substantially to completion without degrading the quality of the first and second foodstuffs.

15 2. The package of claim 1, wherein the foodstuffs are appetizers.

3. The package of claim 1, wherein the first and second foodstuffs are designed to be cooked in hot oil.

20 4. The package of claim 1, wherein the package is non-segmented such that the first and second foodstuffs are commingled within the package.

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5. The package of claim 1, wherein the first foodstuff also has a first predetermined characteristic, and wherein the second foodstuff has a second predetermined characteristic, the first and second predetermined characteristics allowing the first and second foodstuffs to be cooked together for the single cooking time.

6. The package of claim 5, wherein the first and second predetermined characteristics may be the same characteristic.

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7. The package of claim 5, wherein the first and second predetermined characteristics are one of varied salt content, varied size, varied moisture content, and varied coating.

8. The package of claim 1, wherein neither the first nor second foodstuffs are precooked.

9. The package of claim 1, wherein the first and second minimum predetermined component weights are different from each other.

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10. The package of claim 1, further comprising up to four additional foodstuffs having different compositions, wherein the up to four additional foodstuffs are also designed to be cooked together for the single cooking time.

11. A method of packaging foodstuffs, the method comprising:

delivering a first quantity of a first foodstuff to a weighing area, the first foodstuff having a first composition;

5 delivering a second quantity of a second foodstuff to the weighing area, the second foodstuff having a second composition different from the first composition;

weighing the first and second foodstuffs individually and in combination; and

10 placing the first and second foodstuffs in a single package such that the single package has a minimum predetermined overall weight, a minimum predetermined component weight of the first foodstuff, and a minimum predetermined component weight of the second foodstuff.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising labeling the package
15 with a single cook time for both the first and second foodstuffs that will allow both the first and second foodstuffs to be cooked substantially to completion without degrading the quality of the first and second foodstuffs.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the act of delivering includes
20 delivering quantities of more than two different foodstuffs to the weighing area.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein delivering the first and second foodstuffs further includes delivering first and second foodstuffs having first and second predetermined characteristics, respectively, that allow the first and second foodstuffs to be cooked together for a single length of time such that the first and second foodstuffs are cooked substantially to completion while maintaining the quality of both the first and second foodstuffs.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein weighing the first and second foodstuffs includes sending respective first and second weight signals to a control system, the control system capable of comparing the first weight signal to the minimum predetermined component weight of the first foodstuff, comparing the second weight signal to the minimum predetermined component weight of the second foodstuff, and combining the first and second weight signals and comparing the combined first and second weight signals to the minimum predetermined overall weight to place the proper amounts of the first and second foodstuffs in the package.

16. A method for preparing foodstuffs for consumption, the method comprising:

providing a package containing a single serving of foodstuffs, the foodstuffs including a plurality of different types of foodstuffs having different compositions, the package having a minimum predetermined overall weight and a minimum predetermined component weight of each of the plurality of different types of foodstuffs;

placing the foodstuffs in a cooking device; and

cooking the single serving of foodstuffs together for a single cooking time such that all of the different types of foodstuffs are cooked substantially to completion while maintaining the quality of the foodstuffs.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein providing a package includes providing a non-segmented package so that the plurality of different types of foodstuffs are commingled within the package.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein providing a package containing a single serving of different types of foodstuffs includes providing a plurality of foodstuffs having different predetermined characteristics to facilitate cooking the plurality of foodstuffs for the single cooking time.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein providing a plurality of foodstuffs having different predetermined characteristics includes providing foodstuffs having one of varied salt content, varied size, varied moisture content, and varied coating.

20. The method of claim 16, wherein cooking the single serving of foodstuffs includes cooking the foodstuffs in hot oil.

5 21. The method of claim 16, further comprising removing the foodstuffs from the package

22. An apparatus for combining and packaging different types of foodstuffs, the apparatus comprising:

a plurality of loading stations;

a conveyor in communication with the loading stations;

5 a scale assembly in communication with the conveyor, the scale assembly including

a plurality of weighing mechanisms for weighing the different types of foodstuffs individually to achieve minimum predetermined component weights for each of the different types of foodstuffs, and

10 a control system operable to combine the minimum predetermined component weights of the different types of foodstuffs to achieve a minimum predetermined overall weight; and

15 a packaging station in communication with the scale assembly for receiving and packaging the weighed foodstuffs.

23. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein the loading stations each include a vibratory table.

20 24. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein the weighing mechanism includes a plurality of buckets that release the foodstuffs to the packaging station.

25 25. The apparatus of claim 24, wherein the control system can identify the individual weights within each bucket, and wherein the control system chooses one or more buckets to open to release the foodstuffs to the packaging station.

26. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein each of the components of the apparatus include a separate control system, and wherein the separate control systems of the individual components are in communication with each other.

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